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TO : Department of State

FROM : Amembassy LONDON

DATE: August 11, 1971

SUBJECT : Viet Nam - Tiger Cages

REF : London 7320 *u/PW*

Enclosed is a letter to the Ambassador from Sir Osmond Williams, Vice Chairman of Amnesty International (British Section), dated August 4, asking for comment on a report by Don Luce from Saigon dated February 9 alleging that three new tiger cages are being built on Con Son. Luce's report is also enclosed.

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BRAND *inf*

Enclosures: *att 8*
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Drafted by:

POL:AGJames/j

Drafting Date:

8/6/71

Phone No.:

114

Contents and Classification Approved by:

POL:WJGalloway *inf*

Clearances:

O-12634

State Dept. declassification & release instructions on file



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His Excellency
The Honourable Walter H. Annenberg,
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary,
American Embassy,
Regents Park,
London N.W.1.

4 August 1971

Your Excellency,

I have been authorized by my Committee to bring to your attention a report received from a Mr. Don Luce, an American working for the World Council of Churches, and to ask

- a) whether the report is true and
- b) if so, how it can be equated with the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, as adopted by the United Nations on 30 April 1955 (the last United Nations International Assembly on this issue was of course held in Kyoto 1970, when a large number of Americans and some Vietnamese were present).

Amnesty International is a humanitarian organisation whose object is to secure for every person the right freely to hold and to express his convictions, and the obligation of every person to extend like freedom to others; in pursuance of that object to secure throughout the world the provisions of Articles 5, 9, 18 and 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Furthermore, irrespective of political considerations, Amnesty International works for the release of persons who in violation of the aforesaid provisions, are imprisoned, detained, restricted or otherwise subjected to physical coercion or restraint by reason of their political, religious, or otherwise conscientiously held belief or by reason of their ethnic origin, colour or language provided they have not used or advocated violence.

I would be grateful for your Excellency's observations concerning the enclosed report.

Yours faithfully,

Osmond Williams
Sir Osmond Williams
Vice-Chairman

AMNESTY HAS CONSULTATIVE STATUS WITH
THE UNITED NATIONS (ECOSOC), UNESCO,
AND WITH THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

Trustees of the Prisoners of Conscience Fund:
Lord Ritchie-Calder, Ian Gilmour, M.P., The Rev. Dr. I. Grank'd, Dr. Ernest
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-8-9-71

NEW TIGER CAGES BEING BUILT

by

DON LUCE

Saigon (Feb.9) Construction of three new blocks of isolation cells is scheduled to begin this month on the penal island of Con Son by an American firm. Each of the three blocks will contain 96 cells. The new construction will allow Con Son officials to drastically increase the number of prisoners held under "tiger cage" conditions, one American who is familiar with the project claims.

The new "tiger cages" will be built by the firm of Raymond, Morrison, Knudsen, Brown, Root and Jones (RMK-BRJ) under a \$400,000 contract. The funds will be provided by MACCORDS (Military Assistance Command Civil Operations for Revolutionary Development Support), the American paramilitary economic aid program here.

The isolation compound will be a "Top Ten Project", one person familiar with RMK-BRJ priorities said. As such, it will receive priority in the routing of supplies and assignment of personnel.

The Vietnamese authorities already have one cell block under construction. A January 7 memo describing the job to be done at Con Son states that the new construction is to be "similar to the isolation cell block currently under construction as a self-help project."

Prison labour will be used in the construction. Skilled prison labor will be paid 200 piasters (72 cents) per week and unskilled labor will receive 150 piasters (55 cents) a week. There is some concern that the prisoners will not be in good enough physical condition to do a "full day's work". Discussion is under way about the possibility of providing special extra rations for those who work on the project.

Con Son prison was in the news last July when two American congressmen found the "tiger cages" which had been kept secret for years by the Vietnamese government. The "tiger cages" visited by Congressmen William Anderson and Augustus Hawkins were built by prison labor in 1939 under the direction of the French.

Congressman Anderson wrote to President Nixon following that visit: "The Tiger Cage imprisonment of human beings and the savage mistreatment of these prisoners are outrageous contradictions to the minimal standards of political decency, we, as a free American people, should establish as a condition of our aid and friendship to any nation."

The January 7 memo which describes what the RMK-BRJ firm will build, states: "The Scope of Work is the completion of three cell blocks, each partitioned into 96 isolation cells, an outer compound wall of concrete block; a barbed wire perimeter fence with security gates; kitchen; and dispensary."

Approved For Release 2001/08/30 : CIA-RDP73B00296R000300050008-6

Ten Porta-Kamp air-conditioned trailers were sent by barge to Con Son on 8-4-71

February 6 to provide living quarters for nine Americans, one French employee, eight Vietnamese specialists and cooks and helpers. Mr. Ray Simmons has been named Project Superintendent.

A concerted effort has been made by both RMK-BRJ and the U.S. government to keep the project a secret.

"Anyone who even takes a camera to Con Son will be terminated immediately," the RMK-BRJ project manager is reported to have said.

The persons who provided the information for this article have requested that their names not be used. However, copies of five different memos on "Project S623/70 Isolation Compound, Con Son" are in the possession of this writer.

RMK-BRJ began work in Viet Nam in 1962. Its projects have included construction of roads, airports, military compounds for the South Vietnamese government, radar sites, etc. "It is," said one of its employees, "the largest construction consortium in the world." It is best known in Viet Nam for the construction at Cam Ranh Bay. RMK-BRJ headquarters are in San Bruno, California.

The July publicity surrounding the "tiger cages" led to the formation of a special committee for the improvement of South Vietnamese prisons headed by Professor Nguyen Van Trung, former dean of the Faculty of Letters at the University of Saigon. The most important success of this committee's work and the Vietnamese press campaign against prison brutality is that all 300 women who were held in the "tiger cages" at Con Son have been returned to the mainland.

However, the present condition of the male prisoners on the island is not known. Several journalists have been refused visits. Former U.S. Congressman Allard Lowenstein's request to go to Con Son was turned down by the Vietnamese Ministry of Interior.

The one Congressman, Philip Crane, who was allowed to go to the island shortly after the Anderson/Hawkins trip claims to have found the Tiger Cages "cleaner than the average Vietnamese home."

In October, Vietnam's largest daily newspaper, Tin Sang (Morning News) reported a riot involving 300 prisoners demanding better living conditions. As a result of this uprising, Tin Sang wrote, 6000 prisoners were put into a maximum security area "no different from the Tiger Cages."

end it.